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ABSTRACT

Through parents' accounts, this book provides information about the experience of having an autistic child in the family. It examines the nature of autism, the problems it presents, and the various ways that parents cope with the disorder. Chapter 1 discusses the experiences of families with autistic members and the sequence in which they were encountered. Chapter 2 describes the onset of symptoms, parents' reactions to them, and the medical referral and diagnostic process. Chapter 3 discusses life with a child with autism from the parents' and siblings' viewpoints. Chapter 4 describes the stresses that parents encounter and their attempts to cope with them. The problem of stigma is addressed in Chapter 5. Its nature, its place in the context of other research on chronic illness, and an evaluation of the unique qualities of autism as a stigmatizing disorder are discussed. Chapter 6 examines parents' beliefs concerning causes and the meanings they construct in conceptualizing the illness. Chapter 7 examines relationships between parents and staff at an autistic treatment center. Chapter 8 relates to future prospects and concerns and parents' hopes and expectations in this regard. Finally, Chapter 9 summarizes the findings of the book. (Contains 68 references.) (CR)

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